



STATE SENATOR • LIZ BRATER • 18TH DISTRICT

Brater Press Release

P.O. Box 30036 • Lansing • Michigan • 48909-7536 • Toll-free 866-305-0318
E-mail: senlbrater@senate.michigan.gov • 517-373-2406 • Fax: 517-373-5679

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE
February 11, 2004

CONTACT: Sen. Liz Brater
(517) 373-2406

SEN. BRATER ASSAILS FREE TRADE AGREEMENTS FOR SUGAR

Brater: Michigan sugar industry will suffer

LANSING - Sen. Liz Brater (D-Ann Arbor) today criticized the current trade agreement negotiated with five Central American countries that would increase substantially the amount of sugar those countries export over the next 15 years. The Central American Free Trade Agreement (CAFTA) would nearly double the amount of duty-free access to the U.S. sugar market during that time. The agreement includes El Salvador, Guatemala, Honduras, Nicaragua, and Costa Rica.

“Not only does this agreement restrict open competition for the Michigan and U.S. sugar markets, but it sets a precedent for the other 23 sugar exporting countries with whom the president is negotiating,” Brater said. Brater is the ranking Democrat on the Agriculture, Forestry & Tourism standing committee. Her remarks came at an Agricultural Commission meeting earlier this week.

Brater was joined by colleague Sen. Jim Barcia (D-Bay City), Senate Appropriations Agriculture Subcommittee vice chair, in expressing concerns over the proposed agreement.

The CAFTA plan would allow the five countries to export an additional 90,000 metric tons of sugar into the U.S., with a two percent increase per year for the next 15 years. Congress is expected to vote on the measure this spring.

Following the Senators’ statements, the Commission unanimously passed a resolution expressing similar concerns regarding the “adverse impacts that some bilateral and regional free trade agreements have on agriculture.”

-more-

Sen. Brater's and Barcia's remarks and the Commission's action followed last week's letter from Gov. Jennifer Granholm to President Bush which said, in part: "There is grave concern that the trade negotiations will destroy an industry that is facing unfair competition from subsidized producers from countries with minimal labor and environmental standards."

The sugar program has been a part of the federal farm program for nearly 50 years. It includes a federal loan program to processors with no cost to taxpayers, an import quota system on foreign sugar, and market allotments for domestic sugar to maintain balance between supply and demand.

"It's important to remember that in addition to the competitive restrictions these imports represent, they are not required to meet the high quality standards demanded by domestic producers," Brater said. "And since children unfortunately comprise a substantial portion of the market, we could be jeopardizing their health and safety."

#

Senator Brater represents Senate District 18 which includes the cities of Ann Arbor and Ypsilanti, the Villages of Barton Hills, Chelsea, and Dexter, and the following townships: Ann Arbor, Augusta, Dexter, Freedom, Lima, Lyndon, Northfield, Salem, Scio, Sharon, Superior, Sylvan, Webster and Ypsilanti. She is the minority vice chair of the natural Resources and Environmental Affairs Committee and the Agriculture, Forestry, and Tourism Committee